.L539



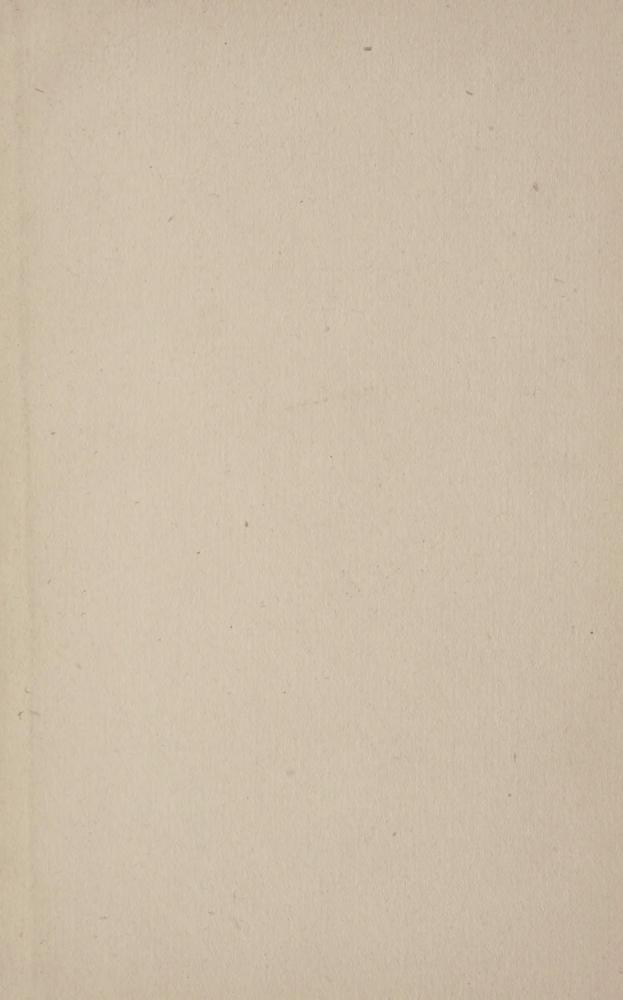


Class PZ 7

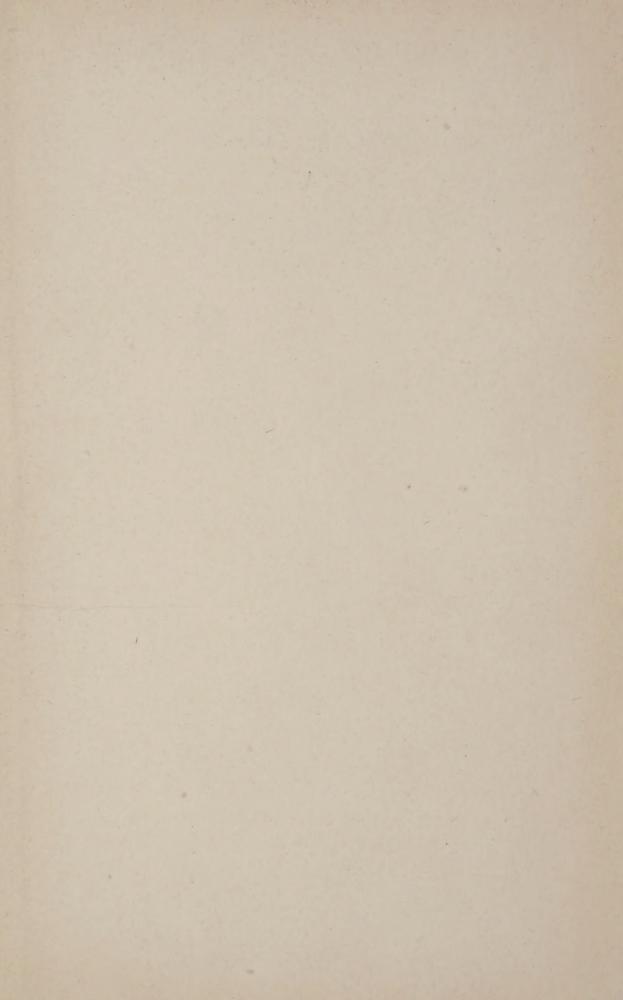
Book _ 539

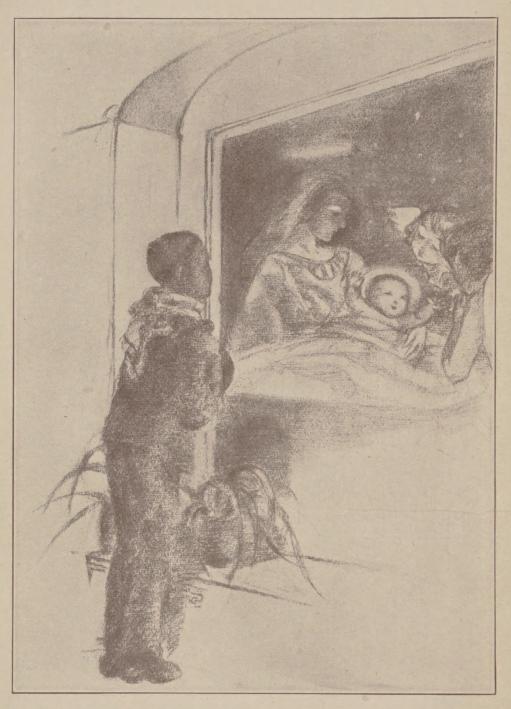
Copyright No Pa

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT



.





Patrick stole softly forward to the painting to obtain a nearer view of the wonderful picture of the Christ-child. Page 23.

Patrick's First Christmas

And Other Stories for Children

By MARGARETE LENK



ROCK ISLAND, ILL.
AUGUSTANA BOOK CONCERN

P1530

COPYRIGHT, 1921,
BY
AUGUSTANA BOOK CONCERN.

OR A653505

DEC 23 '21

22-1071

mal

CONTENTS.

PATRICK'S FIRST CHRISTMAS	5
CAST UP FROM THE SEA	60
CHRISTMAS EVE	102





N an island in the mighty Mississippi there stood many years ago an old tumble-down house surrounded by well-tilled fertile fields and smiling meadows.

The house, however, was far from well-kept. There were not white curtains before the grimy windows, and no flower beds before the main entrance. Nor were these things to be expected, for no woman presided as mistress over this home, and the farmer and his only son had neither time nor inclination for anything but the practical details of their work.

Besides the two men there was Patrick, a lad of fourteen, who played the part of servant and drudge to the men. On an unusually fine day in late autumn this lad

was sitting on a huge rock overlooking the river, and gazing with unseeing eyes into the far distance. It was not often that such moments of leisure came to him, for the youthful servant was ordinarily kept strictly to his tasks by his exacting masters.

But this day, Thanksgiving Day, was one of the few days of rest that the occupants of the island allowed themselves.

No one, however, had ever taught Patrick that this day was set aside to return thanks to God for all His blessings. Nevertheless this day had brought a great happiness to the lad, as could be seen from his smiling face and sparkling eyes whenever he opened his tightly clenched fist to gaze upon the three bright silver dollars he had received that morning as the first installment of his wages.

After the dinner at which turkey had been served instead of the customary meager fare, the farmer's son had departed by the ford for the mainland, while the

farmer himself had retired to his chamber and closed the door behind him.

Patrick knew very well what was going on within. He knew that the farmer was counting his money, of which he had a great hoard, and which was the greatest and sole joy of his life. But as for that, Patrick could count his money too, and he did it now over and over again; "one, two, three."

But he soon tired of this, dropped the money into his pocket, and again looked yearningly out over the river to the nearest row of houses of the large city which stretched along the opposite bank.

The lad remembered dimly that years ago he used to wander about the streets of that city as a little ragged urchin, and when night came he would return weary and hungry to a gloomy attic chamber and a pale, frail woman whom he called mother. His heart warmed to her now as he recalled that she had always given him the largest portion of their scanty provi-

sions, retaining little or nothing for herself. But one day she was gone, death had taken her, after which he had lived for a short time in a large house with a number of other boys, and had had plenty to eat and good clothes to wear. Nevertheless he had often tried to run away in order to regain his lost freedom. Vividly and sadly he recalled a wet and gloomy day when the farmer had come to fetch him to this island where he had since lived.

From that time on his life had been one long round of drudgery and toil. As his years and strength increased, the burdens laid upon him were multiplied. Work was his daily portion; play he had never known. Neither the farmer nor his son seemed to consider that the boy had a heart and soul capable of feelings and emotions, and it must be admitted that he scarecly realized this himself.

And yet, his emotional nature had found expression on more than one occasion dur-

ing his brief life. When he first came to the island, the farmer's wife was still living, a kind and gentle woman burdened with ceaseless toil and oppressed by the harsh treatment of husband and son. She had spoken many a kind word to the forlorn boy, had secretly supplied him with choice dainties of various kinds, and when her own long day of toil was over, she had often spent hours mending his clothes. Indeed, she would have done much more for him, had she dared, and had her own life not been cut short. On a cold and rainy spring day some years ago she had given up the hopeless battle of life, and she now rested in a lonely grave in a thicket of young trees on the outskirts of the farm.

As Patrick sat musing about these things, his heart was filled with tenderness and his eyes grew dim with tears.

After the death of the farmer's wife he grew up a sturdy lad and capable of all kinds of work in and about the house, and

even in the fields beyond; but he was totally ignorant of all other things.

Even his powers of speech were imperfectly developed, for the men were taciturn by nature, and when they did speak, their language was sadly rude and provincial.

Patrick's knowledge of the world was confined to what he could see from the shore of his island home. On the bank nearest the island he had often watched men felling trees and clearing the ground for the erection of new buildings in the city continually extending its limits along the river. On the rare occasions when he had visited the opposite side of the island, he had beheld with wonder the broad expanse of the river upon whose bosom boats of all kinds, from palatial steamers to small fishing boats were plying up and down. And all these people, whom he had seen both by land and water, had only one great aim in life, namely the gathering of money—so, at least, the farmer and his son had taught him. It was therefore

only natural that Patrick desired to strive for the same great aim, especially when he grew older and began to take note of the men's conversation as they sat about the fireplace smoking their pipes of a winter evening. Then, one day, he boldly approached the farmer and voiced his ambition which he had long secretly cherished:

"Master, you must begin to give me some money. I am working for you as a hired hand, and you have told me yourself that a hired hand gets regular wages."

"You silly lad, haven't you had food and clothing all these years?" exclaimed the farmer.

"Now I have grown up and must have money. I also want to make a trip to the city at least once a month."

"And why so?" asked the farmer impatiently.

"I want to enjoy the spending of my money in the city as your son does," Patrick replied. "I am just as good as he is;

we are all equal in this free land of ours, so you have often declared and also read to me from the city paper you sometimes bring home."

A moment the farmer eyed the robust lad with dark looks, then he went into his chamber and brought out the three silver dollars which he reluctantly placed in the boy's hand.

"That's plenty for you now," he declared brusquely. "When spring comes I'll give you some more. Next Christmas you can go to town, but you must manage it yourself, for you can't have the team."

And now Patrick was sitting on the rock with his precious dollars in his pocket and four more weeks to wait before he could spend them for the fun he desired to have. What this fun was he didn't know; but he had often heard the farmer growl at his son for wasting so much money on fun, when it might have been preserved in the old man's money bags.

As he now sat on the rock by the river,

the idea suddenly occurred to Patrick that he should run away from his harsh taskmasters. It would be an easy matter for him to wade and swim the short distance across to the city.

But no! He couldn't do it. For there was something else besides the power of habit to keep him on the island.

Last spring the old white mare had given birth to a colt which was so weak and puny that the farmer decided to kill it in order to avoid all further trouble with it. But when the farmer had raised his gun to shoot, the colt had looked so appealingly at Patrick that he had uttered a cry of agony, and rushing forward had pleaded so earnestly for permission to nurse the sickly colt for a week or two longer that the farmer had finally yielded to his prayers.

Patrick kept his promise, and sure enough, white little Jim grew rapidly stronger and soon became a fine and promising colt. Whenever Jim saw Patrick he

would trot up to him and rub his head against the lad's shoulder; and with a glow of satisfaction Patrick would throw his arms about Jim's neck and fondle him. The lad was beginning to discover that he had a heart after all! No! To leave the island was to leave Jim, and that was out of the question!

So he waited patiently for the coming of Christmas and during this time learned that the mere possession of money did not tend to make him any happier. He could not understand why the old farmer guarded his own money with such anxious care.

Finally the great day arrived—Christmas when the hearts of all Christian people are filled with joy and gladness. But Patrick knew nothing about the beautiful Christmas story. No one had ever spoken to him about God or about the Christchild born on Christmas Day. All he knew was that Christmas was a time of scrubbing and baking and that plum pudding was then served.

The two men stayed at home and mixed themselves some strong drink after the Christmas dinner. But Patrick bade farewell to Jim, gave him several lumps of sugar that he had saved and then he set out on foot for the wonderful city.

As it was cold and the ice was thick, Patrick soon reached the bank of the river; but after that the way became more difficult on account of the rocks and underbrush along the shore. It was an hour before he reached the highway, and it was dusk when he sat down to rest on the stone steps of a large house in the outskirts of the city.

Soon he became aware from the shouts and laughter that reached him from the house that something unusual was taking place behind those blazing windows. Perhaps this was the very place where he could have the fun for which he had been longing!

He climbed up to the window and peered in. Two negroes were fighting, and a

crowd of white men was standing around with liquor glasses in their hands cheering and laughing boisterously. Ugh! This, surely, was not the fun he was looking for!

He proceeded on his way and came to one of the poorer quarters of the city; but to Patrick the brilliant shop windows and the decorated Christmas trees were grand sights indeed. Gaudy toys, many-colored candies, and shining chinaware everywhere met his gaze and served to delay his progress through the city.

Patrick suspected that all these things might be bought for money; but what should he do with them and how could he dispose of them in his little attic chamber on the island?

But just then something very beautiful in one of the shop windows caught his attention: a red leather strap studded with shining bells such as were hung on horses when they were hitched to sleighs in winter.

How fine that would be for his beloved



The fog and mists arising from the sea began to appear as spirit forms to her, and in the roaring of the storm she seemed to hear the hoarse songs of the gods of the sea, proclaiming good luck or misfortune to the children of men. Page 69.



Jim! He promptly entered the shop, purchased the sleighbells for one of his dollars, hung them over his shoulder, and went merrily on his way to the tune of the jingling bells.

The streets were growing quiet and deserted. Here and there small groups of children were hurrying onward as if belated. Patrick followed these and soon arrived at an open square in the middle of which two houses were situated, one of them surmounted by a high tower. Patrick knew this to be a church but what a church was for he did not have the slightest idea.

The high arched windows were blazing with light, and the great bell in the tower peeled forth joyously. In the square before the church a large number of boys and girls were arranging themselves in a long column which presently marched up the church steps and disappeared within the open doors. Then the sound of music burst upon his ears—music so beautiful

and grand that tears sprang into the eyes of the lad, he knew not why.

Here Patrick must surely enter, even if it cost him his two remaining dollars, for here he would surely find the fun he had dreamt about.

He hastily joined the procession and was just entering behind the last of the boys when he was suddenly grasped by the arm and halted. A tall man stood beside him, who inquired:

"Who are you, my lad? You don't belong to the Sunday school."

"No, I live on the island," Patrick replied.

"What do you want here then?" the man asked.

"I want to have some fun," Patrick answered stoutly.

The man stood looking down upon him a moment as if reflecting; then he said:

"Very well, my lad! But you must leave the sleighbells outside."

"But they are mine. I have bought

them for Jim, and they cost me a dollar," Patrick declared anxiously.

Then the man opened a door to a side room and smilingly said:

"Come, we will hang your bells here, and when you leave you can get them again."

Patrick looked suspiciously about the room where there was only a table and several chairs. What if this man was one of those thieves who, he had heard, infested the city? But no, the man seemed good and kind, and besides he was well dressed. So Patrick allowed himself to be gently pushed in through the church door which closed behind him.

The poor lad, accustomed as he was to a lonely life, felt almost afraid of the large throng of people that filled the great, brilliantly lighted church. He sat down in the last pew, from which the sloping floor made it possible for him to overlook the entire room.

Everything he saw was strange and

wonderful. But presently his attention was attracted by something which caused him to forget all else. It was not the towering Christmas tree with its candles and sparkling decorations that had awakened his interest; it was a large beautiful painting in the chancel behind the altar. The painting represented a little child in swaddling clothes, lying upon some straw in a wooden manger such as Patrick had been accustomed to feed Jim from every day. A wonderful radiance lit up the child's face, and about its little head was a shining, golden halo. The child's little hands were outstretched as if to embrace all the world. All about the manger a number of lovely children were kneeling with folded hands and clad in white robes, while upon their shoulders there were large, silvery wings.

Presently the smallest children sitting in the foremost pews began to sing accompanied by soft, sweet music which seemed to come from above.

As never before, Patrick now was conscious of that he possessed a heart. It began to pound so hard and loud that he had to press his hand against it. The tears rolled down his cheeks, and yet he was supremely happy! Had he dared, he would have rushed forward and kissed the Child in the manger, for he felt that this child was the chief source of all the brightness and joy that surrounded him.

And in this he was not mistaken, for now the man who had taken his bells from him appeared, clad in a long black robe, and as he began to speak, he pointed repeatedly to the child in the manger. And as he pointed, all the little heads of the children would look up at the painting, and time and again they would sing sweet songs of praise that filled Patrick's heart with gladness.

Unfortunately poor Patrick understood very little of what was said and sung, however much he might desire to know who the Child in the manger was. He was

not accustomed to listen to long, connected speeches, and this man's way of talking was quite different from that of the farmer on the island.

In the last song of all, however, Patrick noticed a word that was repeated over and over: Hosanna! Hosanna! He liked the word and hummed it to himself, for his heart was full and warm with feeling.

But though his singing was not above a whisper, the Father in heaven heard it and took pity on the poor ignorant lad. God's guiding hand had brought him to this place, in order that on this very day the first bright ray of the light from above might shine down into his benighted heart.

After the program two pleasant looking gentlemen, each with a large basket hung over his shoulder, passed from pew to pew distributing to the children rosy-cheeked apples, nuts, animal cookies, and gaily colored Christmas candies. Of these goodies Patrick also received an abundant por-

tion. He had been hungry when he entered the church, but now happiness had deprived him of his appetite. So he stored it all away in his pockets, planning to give it to Jim.

By this time the children were marching out of church with happy, smiling faces. Patrick, however, did not join them, but stole softly forward to the painting to obtain a nearer view of the wonderful picture of the Christ-child.

It seemed more beautiful and radiant than ever, now that many of the lights had been extinguished. Who was this child, and why did it lie in a manger? And how did it come that the children about the manger all had wings?"

Suddenly the picture was blotted out, and Patrick was startled to find himself in darkness. But a hand was laid reassuringly on his shoulder, and turning he beheld the man in the black robe with a small lamp in his hand.

"Come," he said, "now you may get your sleigh bells and go home."

As if waking from a beautiful dream, Patrick looked up at the man and asked anxiously:

"But what has become of the beautiful child?"

"O, you see," explained the man smiling, "the picture is a transparency, and the light behind it has been put out. Watch me now as I go behind it with my lamp, and you will see it faintly again."

"Yes, yes, now I see it!" Patrick exclaimed joyously. "But say, who is it? You must know, for you were talking to the children about it, but I didn't understand much of what you said, for you don't talk the same way as we do on the island."

"Don't you really know who the child is?" asked the pastor with astonishment.

"How should I know?" Patrick retorted.
"I have never seen it on the island, and to-day is the first time I've been in the city for many years."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the

pastor. "It's growing cold here, and my lamp is burning down. Come with me to my house, and I'll tell you all about the child. But have you time, and is there no one at home to be anxious about you if you linger?"

The boy shook his head and willingly followed the pastor, who again hung the sleigh bells across the lad's shoulder, locked the church door, and conducted Patrick to the parsonage next to the church.

They entered a pleasant but simply furnished room. A fire blazed in the open fireplace, and a large lamp shed its light upon an inviting table set with a steaming teapot, bread, cold meat, and fresh, fragrant Christmas muffins.

"Ah, how splendidly my kind neighbor lady has prepared things for me!" exclaimed the pastor, pleasantly surprised. "Now you can sit down with me to this light repast. You are alone this Christmas Eve, and so am I. We seem to belong

together. I'll fetch you a plate and a cup from the sideboard. There now, sit down; I hope you are as hungry as I am."

Wonderingly Patrick observed how the young pastor folded his hands and spoke aloud before they began to eat, although the lad looked in vain for the person addressed.

The meal was just to Patrick's taste, and he began to feel greater confidence in his host, who was so unlike the farmer on the island, and who spoke so kindly to him as no one had done since the death of the farmer's wife.

While they were eating, the pastor gently questioned the boy and learned with pity that Patrick had never known the love of parents or kindred, had never attended school or church, could neither pray, nor read and write, and only knew the name of God to use it in oaths which he had learned from his masters when they were displeased about something. He also discovered that the lad knew little or

nothing of the world, did not know where he should spend the night, or how he should employ the coming Christmas Day.

"Is there no one on the island at all that cares for you, or that you care for?" the pastor finally inquired.

"O yes, there is Jim," Patrick replied.

"Who is Jim?"

"Jim is the little sickly colt that I nursed until it got well. And then, of course, there is the grave where the farmer's wife lies buried—I like that too. She was kind to me and gave me food and clothing when I was a little boy."

"But didn't you tell me that the farmers gave you food and clothing too? Why don't you like them then?"

"O, they feed and clothe me because I work for them," Patrick replied. "But the farmer's wife gave me these things because she liked me, and because she was kind and good."

"I think you are right," the pastor replied. "When you have finished your meal,

I will tell you about one who is always on your island, and who is kind and good even to those who do not deserve it. And that one is the Father of the Christ-child whose picture you saw."

"But he can't be on the island," Patrick declared, "for then I would know of it."

"Listen! I am tired and will sit down in this armchair, and do you sit on the stool at my feet and pay close attention to what I say. I am going to tell you many wonderful and beautiful things."

Then the good pastor began to speak to this big but ignorant boy as if he were a little child. And God put the right words into his mouth so that Patrick, who all the while sat gazing up at him with shining eyes, could grasp what he was saying.

After an hour had passed, Patrick knew that there was a God who had created all things that exist, and who loved all human beings and wished to make them happy. Patrick also learned that he had often

grieved and offended this Heavenly Father by hatred and bitterness, by evil thoughts and words. He even confessed that he had felt unhappy every time he had quarrelled with the farmer and his son, or had played them some mean trick in anger. Patrick further learned that God had sent His beloved Son into the world to become a poor little child in order that He might take away our sins and make all—even Patrick himself—happy for all time. At these words Patrick's face lit up with joy, for now, at last, he knew who the beautiful child in the manger was.

But the smile soon vanished, his features began to twitch, his head sank down upon the pastor's knee, and violent sobs shook his whole body.

Gently the pastor stroked the lad's close cropped head and spoke soothingly:

"There, there, my boy, that will do for to-day. Thank God that He has permitted you to hear about the Child in the manger. I have ever so much more to tell you, and

you must come to see me often; but now we must have some sleep. I am going to make a bed for you here on the couch."

While the pastor was busy with these preparations, Patrick wiped away his tears and advancing to the table placed his two remaining dollars on it.

"What is that for?" the pastor inquired.

"That's the pay," the boy declared.

"You have given me food to eat and a bed to sleep in, and besides you have made me happier than I've ever been before. But the farmer has told me that you can get nothing without pay in the city. Take this money then—it's all I have."

"Put your money back in your pocket," said the pastor with a smile. "What I am doing for you, I do because I love you."

Next morning the pastor had an easy time of it. Ordinarily he had to make the fire, cook the coffee, polish his shoes, and feed his horse; but this morning Patrick had performed all these tasks expeditious-

ly and well, and with a radiant countenance, because he, too, was actuated by love. And this was a new and strange sensation to Patrick.

That day he again attended church, and now he was able to grasp much more of what he heard.

When they had eaten their dinner together, his kind benefactor said to Patrick:

"Now I must make a trip away from the city to speak in a country church about the Christ-child. You had better depart for home at once so that you may reach your island before dark, for it looks as if a storm were brewing. But tell me, how often can you come to see me so that I can tell you more about the Child in the manger?"

"Four times a year, the farmer said that I might come to town," Patrick replied.

"Four times a year! That's not enough.
Why, you would forget from the one time

to the other all that I had tried to teach you," the pastor exclaimed.

"I will forget nothing; it's all in here," Patrick declared, placing his hand over his heart.

"But you should also learn to read," the pastor asserted. "That's absolutely necessary!"

"Reading is no good," Patrick objected.

"Every time the farmer and his son read
their paper they quarrel about it."

"That is because they do not know the Christ-child," replied the pastor. "Do you see that large book on the desk? In it is written down all that the glorious Christ-child has done and suffered for us. Surely, you want to learn to read that, don't you?"

After reflecting a moment the lad replied:

"I believe I can fix it so that I can come oftener this winter. But when spring and summer come, there is too much work to do."

With this arrangement the good pastor had to be content for the present, and so they parted.

The two surly men on the island did not ask Patrick how he had spent his Christmas; they only laughed at him when they heard that he had paid a whole dollar for the sleigh bells. After a time, however, they could not help but notice that the lad was changed, that he somehow seemed pleasanter and happier than before. He had always been a good worker, but now his tasks were finished with surprising promptness and thoroughness. When he thought himself unnoticed he would often sing at his work. But when evening came he would sit before the fire for hours at a time submerged in deep thought.

But who can describe the old farmer's amazement when two weeks after his visit to the city Patrick again presented himself and asked for a holiday? An oath burst from the old man's lips, and he raised his hand to strike. But Patrick calmly repeated his request and added:

"If you let me go to town every Saturday evening and stay there over Sunday, you won't have to give me any wages all winter, and I will work harder and better than ever before."

"Go, then, if you must," cried the farmer; "but you are a fool to do it! You will soon find out what you can do in town without money. I suppose you expect to beg your food and sleep in the snow."

So it came about that Patrick arrived at the parsonage at dusk every Saturday and stayed there over Sunday dinner. He thought that he was making amazing progress in learning, though the pastor often found it slow and discouraging work.

The boy's heart responded warmly and eagerly to the gospel message of Christ's love; but his lack of training made it difficult for him to memorize the short Bible texts and songs and lessons from the catechism assigned him. Learning to read was also a long and laborious task.

Before long his masters discovered what he was doing in the city, for every evening he labored with his primer in the sweat of his brow. They often made fun of him, but it never entered their thoughts to aid him along the thorny path of knowledge.

When the long and severe winter was nearing its end, the pastor one day said to his pupil:

"Patrick, if it will be impossible for you to come to me all summer, I am afraid that you will soon forget what you have labored so hard to learn, even if your heart remains true to Jesus your Saviour. Come, wouldn't you like to leave the island altogether? I could easily find work for you in the city, and then you could visit me an hour daily, and make much more rapid progress in learning to read. If the farmer has so much money as you say, why can't he obtain another farm hand?"

"O, he can well enough, but he won't," Patrick declared. "He holds on to his money as hard as he can. Do you know

that I believe that money is to him what Jesus is to you!"

"Perhaps, though, he would let you go, if I came out to the island and had a talk with him about it," the pastor replied.

"O, don't do that!" cried Patrick in alarm. "He would only abuse and curse you, and I know how much that would hurt you. Please don't feel hurt, but I can't come to the city to live. I belong to the island, and Jim belongs to me, so you see we must remain together."

The pastor felt that for the present he had better leave matters in this state. If he tried to exert undue pressure upon the lad, he was afraid that he might injure the good work that God had begun in Patrick's heart. All that summer, however, he prayed earnestly for his young friend; and when the work in the fields was approaching its end, he waited impatiently for the coming of Patrick.

At last, on a stormy day in late October, Patrick arrived wet to the skin and be-

spattered with mud, but presenting a face radiant with happiness.

"Here I am again," he cried joyously; "and I haven't forgotten a thing that you taught me! When I worked in the fields, I repeated my lessons aloud; and every evening I read my book over and over. See, I have worn it all to pieces!"

As evidence of this he drew the tattered remnants of his primer from his pocket and displayed it.

"Jim is almost fullgrown now," he continued; "next summer he will start to work at the plow. I'm proud of Jim! Every day I've sung to Jim the songs you taught me, and he seems to like them. And here are six dollars that I've earned this summer. What shall I do with them?"

"We will find some way to use them," replied the pastor; "in the meantime I will take care of them for you."

"Best of all I would like to buy the book that tells about the Christ-child," Patrick declared; "but I suppose I haven't money

enough for that, and I can't ask you to trust me till I make some more."

"My dear lad!" the pastor said, "I have many such books, and I will gladly give you one for nothing as soon as you can read it properly."

From that day Patrick made rapid progress. His spirit, so long dormant, seemed to awake to new and vigorous life, and his speech as well as his manners showed marked improvement. When Christmas Eve arrived he could take part in the singing, and great, indeed, was his joy when the pastor presented him with a handsome Bible with a strong leather binding.

But all too rapidly the winter days sped swiftly to an end, and the time approached when Patrick would no longer be able to make his weekly visits to the parsonage. Now more than ever the pastor dreaded the coming separation, for the unfolding mind and soul of the boy would be increasingly exposed to the evil influences of his masters on the island.

Up to this time Patrick's soul-life had been that of a child. Now he was beginning to know and understand something of the world about him. Temptations, strong and terrible, were lurking in his path. Would he find strength to resist and overcome them?

The boy himself now felt that he did not belong on the island; but he could not make up his mind to leave it, and he pleaded eagerly with the pastor not to try to persuade him to take such a step. For Jim, his dear pet and friend, was going to be hitched to the plow in the spring, and Patrick knew only too well the cruel treatment the young, spirited colt would receive if left in charge of the farmer's ill-natured son. He had often seen the son's merciless treatment of the other animals about the farm. No, Jim had been Patrick's friend long before the latter had known the pastor; it would be ungrateful of the lad to desert Jim now! He was determined to train Jim to his work with

infinite patience and gentleness, and he was already rejoicing in the thought of having the sole management of him during the summer. But "man proposes and God disposes," as Patrick was soon to learn.

Then came a momentous evening in the middle of March. The winter had been long and severe, and as yet there had been but few signs of the approach of spring. But the last few days, warm weather had suddenly set in, melting the ice and snow throughout the entire length of the river valley, even in the far north where the river has its source.

Ever since the day before Patrick had noticed that the water had been mounting higher and higher up the rather low shores of the island, washing away the soil and gravel and even carrying off rocks of considerable size. He also noticed that the retaining wall along the river front of the city was almost submerged.

The farmers on the island, however,

were not alarmed, for they had often seen high water before, and they had no fears that the water would reach the house on the highest point of the island, nor even the barn and sheds at a somewhat lower level. But as a precaution they got ready their old boat which they seldom used, and fastened it with a stout chain to a stake at the foot of the rising ground. The young farmer declared that he would sit up and watch during the night, and leave the following night for Patrick to be on guard, if the river did not fall in the meantime.

Patrick went calmly to sleep after having committed himself to God's care; but in the middle of the night he was suddenly awakened by the din of the storm and the roar of the rising flood. He started up and looked out through his attic window, but could see nothing on account of the darkness. Ominously near, however, he heard the swish of rushing waters, and hark! was not that the bawling of cattle

in distress, issuing from the barnyard below?

Quick as a flash Patrick pulled on his clothing, and darted down to the kitchen where the young farmer was sitting with his head on the table, fast asleep. Beside him stood a smoking lamp and a half empty whiskey bottle.

"The flood, the flood!" Patrick cried, shaking him with all his might; then he ran into the chamber where the old man was sleeping. He found some difficulty in rousing the farmer and in explaining the cause of alarm; but when he had succeeded in this, the old man was seized with nameless anguish.

"My money, my money!" he cried despairingly. "Help me carry my money down to the boat!"

"Yes, yes!" Patrick replied; "but we must first try to save the animals. We must fetch them up to the house; perhaps they will be safe here."

"No, no! not the animals—the money!"

whined the old man, barring the way when Patrick tried to leave him.

Meanwhile the farmer's son had kindled a great pile of brush nearby, which served to light up the scene far and wide.

The immediate neighborhood of the house was still above the water, but the stable and sheds must be partially submerged by this time, and the boat was tossing on the flood and tugging at its chain.

It was still possible to reach the boat, but haste was necessary or the brush fire would go out and leave them in utter darkness. Patrick kept pleading for the animals, particularly Jim, but no one would listen to him. He was compelled to assist in carrying the heavy money chest to the boat, as the farmer's son was busy salvaging articles of value to him. Both the farmers wore rubber boots, but the lad was barefooted and only partially clad. The raging torrent lapped about his breast before he reached the boat. Would

it bear them safely over to the other shore, where large signal fires were by this time burning, in whose light dark forms could be seen rushing about along the river's bank?

"The boat won't carry us all," growled the young farmer. "Run back, boy, and fetch the horses and cattle to the higher ground about the house. The water will soon begin to fall, and you will be safe enough there. When I've brought the old man and his chest to safety, I'll return for you or stay with you until the danger is over."

Patrick waded bravely back to the high ground. O, if he could only save Jim! By the dwindling light of the brush fire Patrick saw that the barn was still standing; but as he made his way through the water toward it, it fell with a crash and was swept away on the flood. At the same time the fire flickered and went out, leaving him in total darkness.

Panick-stricken Patrick rushed back to

the house and stood there leaning against the kitchen door. The water was very near to the house now. Patrick was not afraid to die, for the pastor had told him that death was only a sweet sleep to those who loved Jesus. Indeed, he rejoiced at the thought of coming to heaven, where his eyes would behold all the wonderful things he had heard about. But Jim! A convulsive sob rose to his lips as he contemplated the tragic fate of his dear friend. But perhaps the intelligent colt would be able to save himself by swimming! But where was Jim!

"O, merciful God, save me and Jim, if it is Thy will! O save me—and save Jim too!" So Patrick sobbed and prayed over and over again.

Hark, someone is approaching! Can it be the young farmer coming back for him? Nearer and nearer came a dark form. Presently Patrick could feel a warm breath upon his cold cheek; then he knew it was Jim as the colt rubbed his head against the boy's shoulder.

The dripping colt neighed cheerfully as Patrick stroked his neck, and scarcely knowing what he did, the lad swung up on Jim's back and rested his weary head upon the colt's neck. Slowly and carefully the intelligent creature moved down to the water. Perhaps the bright beacon fires on the opposite shore had attracted his attention, and he wished to seek safety for himself and Patrick in that direction. Once only, Patrick raised his eyes to the sky, and to his disordered fancy the break of dawn seemed to be at hand. But now the water was mounting up Jim's sides and back, and the lad was almost entirely submerged. Convulsively he clung to Jim's mane, his body sank lower upon the colt's neck, and then he lost consciousness.

* * *

In the city the pastor had retired for the night at about the same time that Patrick had sought his bed in the attic chamber on the island. It was midnight when he was aroused by loud voices and

the tramp of many feet along the street ordinarily so quiet at this time of the night.

"What is the matter? Is there a fire somewhere?" he shouted through the open window.

"No, it's the river; it threatens to inundate the city," was the reply.

Apparently the crowd consisted mostly of boys. Perhaps curiosity or the hope of salvaging articles of value from the flood was bringing them down to the river. But the pastor was ill at ease and could not go back to bed. How would Patrick fare if the flood overflowed the island?

In vain he tried to persuade himself that there was nothing he could do, for he could neither swim nor manage a boat in such a raging torrent. The more he reasoned thus, the higher mounted his anxiety for his young friend.

At last he resolutely threw on his clothing, lit the stable lantern, mounted his horse, and galloped off for the river bank.

There he found everything in great confusion, for the flood was more threatening than he had imagined. Spurring off along the bank, he presently found himself opposite to Patrick's island. Here beacon fires had been kindled, and men were busy salvaging property of all kinds from the angry flood.

"How are conditions over on the island?" the pastor inquired repeatedly.

He had to wait some time for an answer, as all were busy with their own affairs on this side of the river and had given no thought to the dwellers on the island.

"The nest on the island must be empty long ago," someone finally replied. "The old miser over there is not likely to allow his money to be lost in the flood."

"But there's a boy out there of whose safety I would like to be assured," the pastor declared. "Won't somebody row me over? I'm willing to pay for it?"

"You're crazy!" was the rough reply.
"Who would want to risk his life for any

of the old miser's folks? Besides, they've got a boat of their own to get away in."

Irresolutely the pastor stood gazing out over the waters toward the dim outlines of the island. Suddenly a bright fire shot up from across the waters. The people must still be out there, then, and perhaps in grave danger. Peering intently into the darkness, the pastor thought that he could discern three dark shapes moving before the fire.

They vanished from sight almost at once, but after a minute or two the light from the fire fell upon a boat tossing on angry waters.

"They'll save themselves all right!" some shouted.

"Impossible!" others cried. "The flood will sweep them away to their death!"

But the pastor was gazing fixedly and with growing anxiety at the boat, for, try as he would, he could see but two forms in it. Could the heartless farmers have left the boy behind?

Suddenly the fire flared up brightly for a moment only to dwindle again and die down completely, leaving the island in utter darkness. With bated breath the people watched and listened for the coming of the boat, but in vain. The swift current must have swept it down the river or engulfed it in its tossing flood.

Meanwhile the water rose ever higher. Everything movable along the shore was carried away. The people began to disperse and the beacon fires died down. A dim glow along the eastern horizon heralded the coming of a new day.

"Go home, pastor," said one of the men kindly. "There is nothing more that you can do."

"O, I can't go home!" the pastor replied.

"I am sure that there were only two in the boat. What if my poor lad has been left to his fate on the island?"

Again he peered out across the tossing, foaming waters. Suddenly he started violently and cried:

"Look, there's something floating out there! I see it distinctly, it's a white object! And it isn't a plank or a tree; it's a living thing! O, who will help me save Patrick?"

As if in reply a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a youth in sailor dress stood by his side.

"Come," he said brusquely, "I'll risk it with you. Not for money, however; but for God's sake."

Hastily untying a boat, the sailor and the pastor rowed with all their might out toward the white object. Now they could see it struggle with the current. And now they could discern that it was a white horse with someone clinging to its neck. Surely, it was Jim and Patrick fighting for their lives!

The pastors' heart beat violently, and fervent prayers arose to God for help and guidance. But alas! When only a few boat lengths separated them from the horse, the lad's body slipped from its back

and vanished beneath the surface of the river. The pastor uttered a cry of anguish, but the sturdy young sailor plunged overboard. When he reappeared at the surface, he had the unconscious lad in his strong grasp. It required but a moment to haul himself and Patrick into the boat. Poor, faithful Jim cast a last despairing look at his young master, then his strength failed him and he was swept away by the flood, nevermore to be the pride and comfort of Patrick's heart.

After a desperate struggle with the current the boat again reached shore where it was hauled out of the water by willing hands. Patrick was carried to a near-by house where he was soon restored to consciousness, and after being furnished with a change of clothing, he was able to ride home with his friend and protector, the pastor.

As he lay on the couch at the parsonage, pale and weak from his long exposure, his pent-up sorrow over the loss of his faith-

ful Jim burst all bounds, and for a long while no comforting word of the pastor could check his violent grief. Finally the pastor said in a tone of mild reproof:

"Patrick, I had thought that you would be able to sacrifice something for the Lord Jesus who has given all for you! Can't you believe that it was God's will that you should lose Jim, and won't you try to bow in submission to His will?"

"Yes, I'll try, I'll try!" sobbed the poor heart-broken boy, throwing his arms about the pastors' neck. "But let me stay with you, for now you are the only one left for me to love, and to love me in return!"

The pastor drew the forsaken lad into his arms, and promised himself and God that he would faithfully and lovingly care for the boy as if he were his younger brother.

When the sun arose that morning, it could be seen that the house on the island had disappeared, that the orchard and fields had been ruined, and that much of

the soil had been washed away by the flood. The two farmers were never heard of again. It was never learned whether they had found their grave in the raging river, or had succeeded to save themselves and treasure chest, and had settled down at some distant place. No one, however, missed them nor mourned for them, for they were never known to have done a deed of kindness to anyone.

Some days later, when Patrick had bravely conquered his sorrow and regained his strength, the pastor said to him one evening:

"As you have shown yourself a brave lad, I am now going to tell you something that will make you glad. I know that you don't like very well to live in the city with its large houses and crowds of people, but that you are willing to put up with it out of regard for me. Isn't that so?"

"Indeed it is!" Patrick declared. "But I confess that I sometimes feel as if I were a prisoner in this large city."

"Listen then," the pastor continued.
"In a short time we are going to move away from the city and out into the country. There we will have a large garden and orchard surrounded by meadows and woods through which flows a beautiful little stream, and over all there will be the bright blue sky."

"Will there also be a church and a Christmas in the country?" asked Patrick, remembering the absence of these on his island farm.

"Yes, indeed, there will!" the pastor declared. "And now I want to know if you will take service with me, help me with the garden and orchard, and take care of my horse and other animals that we may find there."

"Yes, I'll serve you well, indeed I will!"
Patrick cried jubilantly.

"But, Patrick, we will not be alone there. I am soon going to take the best woman in the world to be my wife. Will you serve her also as faithfully as you serve me?"

"Well, I suppose a wife is a good thing to have," said Patrick hesitatingly, "she can wash our shirts, cook our food, and plant flowers in the front yard, but—"

Patrick grew suddenly silent and hid his face in his hands. At last he looked up at the pastor, and there were tears in his eyes as he said:

"There was a wicked feeling in my heart—I wanted you all to myself. But I feel better now. The Christ-child loved all people, and I will learn to do the same. For your sake I believe that I already love the lady that you are to take to wife. But we must take good care of her and help her with all the heavy work, so that she does not break down and die, as the old farmer's wife on the island did."

"That we will surely do, Patrick!" declared the pastor heartily.

After Easter the move to the country took place. The hour of parting was not easy; even Patrick felt sad at the breaking of the ties he had formed. The more

joyous, then, was their arrival to the new home where all nature stood decked in festive array as if to greet them.

Patrick was exceedingly happy in the country. All day long he was busy in and about the house, and his evenings were devoted to reading and study under the pastor's guidance. As he was by this time a large and robust youth, he was often hired by the neighboring farmers for wages that were surprisingly large in comparison with the mere pittance he had received on the island. The money thus earned was carefully saved, so that he within a few years could set up for himself and rent a small farm only a short distance from the church and parsonage. The merry troop of children growing up at the parsonage were thus able to make frequent visits to their old friend and playmate, Patrick.

But however pressing Patrick's own work might be, he always set it to one side on Saturdays, for then he had a spe-

cial duty to perform which was his joy and pride. Ever since his first week in the country he had served as sexton of the rural church, and he was tireless in his efforts to keep it clean and inviting for the Sunday services, the approach of which he heralded at sundown every Saturday by solemnly ringing the church bell.

But the happiest time of all for Patrick was Christmas, when he could deck the church with holly and evergreen, and light the candles in the stately Christmas tree. His very first Christmas in the country he had celebrated by spending the six dollars he had earned on the island in the purchase of an exact duplicate of the transparency representing the Christchild which had so rejoiced his heart on that first memorable Christmas Eve. With great secrecy the schoolmaster and himself had gone to town for the picture. With equal secrecy they had placed it in position in the church, and when the proper time arrived Patrick had flashed

on the illumination, much to the surprise and pleasure of the pastor and the whole congregation.

Since then many years had passed, and the picture was old and faded, but to Patrick it ever remained new and a source of the keenest joy.

Every Christmas Eve, as he brought forth the picture from the nook where it had been kept during the year, and as he unrolled it and adjusted it in its frame, he lived over again in spirit that neverto-be-forgotten first Christmas celebration of his life. With joyous anticipation and beating heart he would flash on the lights and reverently gaze upon the radiant features and lovingly extended arms of the little Christ-child. Then it invariably happened that there, in the dark and silent church, the big strong man would sink to his knees, and with bated breath sing over and over again,

"Hosanna!"



Cast Up from the Sea

ORTH of Scotland, where the turbulent North Sea rolls its billows into the broad Atlantic, there are two groups of islands called the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Islands. In the dim past they are said to have formed a powerful kingdom ruled by bold Viking sea kings. Dark heathendom then held sway over the fierce, warlike inhabitants.

Even at the present time large, flat stone altars may be seen upon which priests formerly offered bloody sacrifices to their chief gods, Woden and Thor. Among the victims thus offered up to appease the gods were numbered prisoners of war and seafarers cast up by the waves on these hostile shores.

CAST UP FROM THE SEA

Very early, however, in the Christian era pious Irish monks brought to these bleak islands with their wild inhabitants the gospel message of Christ, the Saviour of mankind. Unfortunately this gospel of peace and good will was soon distorted by popish abuses and heresies. Massive ruins of cloisters and temples still bear witness of the former pomp and power of the Catholic Church on these islands.

But even then much of heathen superstition prevailed, especially on the smaller islands, whose inhabitants consisted chiefly of fisher folk. Many a burly fisherman, who had attended early morning mass and had blessed himself with the sign of the cross, would steal away to the seashore in the starlight of early morning, there to offer sacrifices to the sea gods in order that he might assure himself of favorable winds and a good catch of fish for the day.

Many another half savage islander would kneel among the towering cliffs along the shore and invoke the potent

gnomes inhabiting the dark caverns of the underworld for some small portion of the gold these were supposed to have stored away in their treasure caves.

If in tilling his little patch of ground, such a man afterwards happened to find a gold coin or a tarnished fragment of some golden ornament, he would seldom neglect to bring the king of the gnomes the offering of a hen or a fish as a token of gratitude for the find.

Then came the dawn of the Reformation. Even in these wild, secluded regions the doctrine of Gods free grace in Christ Jesus was everywhere taught, and by many received with gladness. As a result peace, prosperity, and a measure of culture began to spring up, especially on the larger islands. On the smaller islands, however, —many of them so small that they are not even to be found on the map—the poor, ignorant fisher folk still clung to their old heathen practices.

It is from such an island that I now

CAST UP FROM THE SEA

wish to tell a story, the events of which took place about two hundred years ago.

This island is so small that a brisk walker might traverse it from end to end in less than half a day. On three sides of it bare, towering cliffs rise abruptly from the sea whose wild billows dash against these rocky barriers with never-ending roar. But on the south side the island is free from cliffs, and here a straggling fishing village was located; here, also, the fishermen found safe anchorage for their boats. The lowly cottages of the village were surrounded by meager garden patches and small stony fields of tilled ground. In the shadow of a high cliff stood a crumbling old church, whose tiny bell would peal out dolefully whenever the blustering winds set it in motion. No one else ever troubled himself to ring the bell; for the old pastor, who had toiled so long and patiently among the fisher folk, had died long before without leaving kith or kin behind him. Since then no one had felt

called upon to sail over to the mainland for a new pastor.

The rough islanders reasoned that there was scarcely enough food for themselves; why, then, should they burden themselves with a pastor to feed and maintain? It is true that the stony soil yielded but a scanty harvest, and that the patches of meadow-land could support but a few cows and sheep. It is also true that of berry bushes and fruit trees there was scarcely a trace. Nevertheless the islanders were far from suffering want. On the contrary abundance reigned in their lowly cottages, for their exhaustless storehouse all the year round was the vast sea.

This furnished them not only with an unending supply of fish but also with many other useful and valuable articles cast up by the waves.

It frequently happened in these stormy regions that vessels were wrecked upon the reefs and dashed to pieces by the waves. This was especially true in the

time of our story, when ships were neither so large nor so well built as in our day.

Every day of violent storm was therefore an occasion of joyous anticipation and feasting for the islanders, who regarded all things cast up by the waves as their lawful booty. Never a thought did they give to the poor shipwrecked people who found a watery grave in the deep. If a human body was flung upon the beach, it was heartlessly thrust back into the waves, lest it might come to life and lay claim to the treasures supplied by storm and billows.

In vain had the old pastor struggled and warned against this cruel practice. Only a very few had followed their pastor's teachings, and these had removed to one of the larger islands upon his death. Those who remained permitted the old church to fall to ruins, and began to assemble on their days of rest at a place of quite different nature from a church.

On the land side of one of the cliffs along

way upward until it ended at a vaulted opening leading into the interior of a cliff. Here there was a cavern of considerable size, which apparently had been inhabited for years, perhaps centuries. The floor had been leveled and set with a mosaic of stones of various colors. Openings for air and light had been hewn in the sides of the cliff, affording an extensive outlook over sea and sky.

In this cavern Swerta, a very old woman, had made her home for many years. Her form was tall and erect, her hair was silvery white, her eyes were startlingly beautiful, but with a somber glow in their depths.

Only the oldest among the islanders still remembered the awful night when a mighty tidal wave had destroyed many of the fishing boats and even swept away a number of cottages nearest the shore.

That night Swerta, then a buxom young wife, had lost not only all her property but also her husband and two young sons.

From that time she was plunged into the deepest melancholy, and withdrew to the lonely cliff cavern. For a time she subsisted on the gifts set down at the entrance by people who felt sympathy with her. To keep these from penetrating into the cavern she had rolled a large rock into the opening.

The good old pastor, then still living, had tried time and again to bring her the cheer and consolation of Gods holy Word; but she persisted in her refusal to see him. Sorrow over this brought on the good man's last illness, and the following winter his poor, tired body was laid to rest in a lonely grave among the cliffs.

Little by little, however, Swerta's proud nature began to rebel against this mode of sustaining her life by gifts of charity, and she brooded long over some means of keeping want and hunger from her door without again joining in the islanders' ceaseless struggle for existence, or sharing their joys and sufferings with them.

A heart that thrusts away from itself the consolation of divine and human sympathy in time grows cold and indifferent to all feelings of love and affection. Proud Swerta always had been; now she also became hard and bitter, and looked with contempt upon all who still were able to find contentment and happiness in life.

Those who for a long time surrender themselves to passionate grief, and cut themselves off from all association with their fellowmen, will soon begin to see strange sights and hear strange sounds which are unreal and the products of their own imagination.

This is what happened to Swerta.

After having spent the weary hours of the day tearfully bemoaning her sad fate, she would sit all night long near an opening in the cavern wall gazing out over the wild waves, or up at the sky, sometimes covered with threatening clouds, sometimes sparkling with starry radiance.

She had been accustomed from child-

BET !

hood to study the movement of the stars and the ever shifting winds. This now became her only and constant occupation.

Thereafter she began to descend from her cavern every morning, and calling the fishermen about her, she would predict fine weather or storm, a large catch of fish or the opposite according to the observations that she had made.

After a time she did not stop at this. The fog and mists arising from the sea began to appear as spirit forms to her, and in the roaring of the storm she seemed to hear the hoarse songs of the gods of the sea, proclaiming good luck or misfortune to the children of men. The foaming billows were transformed to water spirits whose white arms beckoned invitingly or warned threateningly.

All this Swerta imparted to the superstitious fisher folk in vivid words or wild songs that captured the imagination of her hearers.

As her predictions were fulfilled with

increasing regularity, her power and influence over the rude islanders steadily increased until she virtually became ruler of the island.

She seldom put in an appearance at the straggling village by day, but at sunrise or in the evening twilight she might often be seen wandering about gathering herbs from which she prepared the healing potions for which she was also noted. The villagers no longer remembered that she had learned this art years before from her mother.

Old and young alike avoided her and fearfully gave her a wide berth when they saw her approaching chanting some wild strain as she proceeded on her way.

She would never part with her medicines without compensation, nor did she ever enter a cottage or display any signs of friendly interest toward the islanders.

The children, especially, dreaded her. If the tawny-haired youngsters, as sometimes happened, approached too near her

cliff dwelling in their sports, she would drive them off with wild cries and threatening motions of her formidable staff. Why should these children grow up strong and rosy-cheeked when her own darling little Olof and her brave Harold had found a watery grave?

As years passed, however, her grief at the loss of husband and children gradually diminished, only manifesting itself at rare intervals when she would retire to her cave and remain in seclusion for days at a time. At the earnest entreaties of the villagers she would finally deign to appear again.

As time passed her cliff dwelling no longer remained a bare and desolate cavern. Strong shutters were fixed to the openings in the cliff wall, a soft carpet covered the stone floor, gaily colored cushions were strewn over the benches cut from the living rock, and costly furniture of all kinds lined the walls and filled the recesses of the cavern.

When Swerta appeared among the islanders to announce her predictions, she no longer wore the coarse homespun common to the other women of the island, but she wore a peculiar dress of costly foreign cloth, and a black veil dotted with golden stars fell from her snow-white hair in ample folds about her form.

All these treasures came to her from the storm-tossed sea. Whenever a ship was wrecked upon their rockbound shores, it was Swerta's privilege to pick and choose among the wreckage cast up by the waves. Whatever she touched with her long staff became her property, and woe to the one who dared to question her right to the same!

She also claimed and received a liberal allowance of fish and the meager harvests of the fields.

One day the fishermen were thrown into violent commotion by the announcement from Swerta that a great storm would swoop down upon the island before night.

A long time had passed since the sea had cast anything of value upon their shores. Anxiously they inquired if this day was destined to gladden their hearts with treasures from the deep.

With proud assurance Swerta replied: "The coming storm will yield us a priceless treasure destined to become a blessing to some and a curse to others."

Even the night before, Swerta's trained sense of hearing had caught the first ominous sounds of the approaching storm, and by the aid of a pair of binoculars, which she had once rescued from a chest cast up by the waves, she had dimly discerned the whitecapped towering billows on the distant horizon.

Rapidly the storm drew near, and soon it broke with a mighty roar upon the rock-bound shores of the island. Even the sturdy fishermen could with difficulty breast the storm's fierce onslaught. But Swerta leaning on her staff calmly viewed its coming, her long white hair streaming in the gale.

Hark! Was that a cry of distress? There it sounds again, more faintly now! Slowly the storm abates, but the roaring breakers continue to dash against the shores.

Presently a ship can be dimly seen pounding itself to pieces upon the outer reefs, and soon a shattered mast and some battered planks are washed up on the beach. Breathlessly the rapacious islanders await the coming of more precious spoils.

Finally the longed for treasures begin to appear: a rich and plenteous variety of barrels, chests, bales, and implements of all kinds. All eyes turn to Swerta. What would she select? But all unheeding she stands in a dream, her gaze fixed upon the tossing billows.

A wave, larger, fiercer than the rest, swept far up on the beach, leaving as it receded a white object upon the sands. It proved to be the seemingly lifeless body of a little girl of about ten years of age. A

white woolen dress covered har frail form, a mass of golden hair framed her face of deathlike pallor, and a glittering bracelet circled the wrist of her right arm.

Instantly the wild men surrounded the little form. One of them knelt by her side and placed his hand over her heart.

"She lives!" he whispered; "we cannot thrust the body back into the sea, and we dare not carry it back and toss it in, for that would bring us all bad luck."

Slowly and secretly he drew a knife from his belt. A thrust, and the poor little heart would beat no more!

But suddenly the fiend checked his hand, and with a startled look remained motion-less. Peal on peal, clearer and stronger than ever before, the little bell in the ruined church tower rang out its message of warning. Then Swerta stalked forward and imperiously stretched out her staff over the small prone form on the sand:

"The child is my booty!" she cried.

"This is the priceless treasure that the storm has brought us!"

Calmly she stooped down, and picking up the child she carried it up to her cliff dwelling whither no one ventured to follow her without permission.

A moment the wild men stood eyeing each other in amazement; then with one accord they hurled themselves upon the booty which in increasing quantity was being washed up by the waves. Bales were torn apart, chests and casks were opened, and soon a fierce scramble arose over the precious plunder which consisted of provisions of all kinds, costly bolts of cloth, ready-made garments, spices and other merchandise in endless variety. Even the women, their hair streaming in the wind, rushed in to secure a share in the spoils.

Unfortunately Swerta was not now present to exercise her authority in a fair distribution of the booty, and therefore a wild fight arose which did not end before two men, sorely wounded, were carried

from the beach, while the rest returned in triumph to their homes, laden with the wealth supplied by the waves.

All the men were agreed, however, that for once Swerta had erred in her predictions. For it was clearly impossible that the half-dead child would be a priceless treasure destined to become a blessing to some and a curse to others. No, the treasure was but the usual wreckage from the sea, this time richer and more abundant, it is true, and in so far her prediction had come true.

Respect for the woman with her strange powers were so great, however, that no one ventured to claim a small chest, the contents of which clearly indicated that it belonged to the child cast up by the waves. Without tampering with the contents, they placed it before the entrance of Swerta's cavern.

Within her home Swerta had already undressed the little girl, wrapped her in a warm blanket, and laid her upon the bed.

With skilled though trembling hands she set about to restore the child to consciousness. Finally her efforts were crowned with success. The little girl drew a deep breath and opened her dark-blue eyes only to close them again and sink into a deep sleep.

Long and earnestly Swerta sat gazing upon the sleeping child. Her harsh features took on a strange softness. At last her hands flew to her face, and hot tears found their way between her thin and wrinkled fingers.

"She will live!" she whispered; "and though a girl she is so like my own dear Olof. The same golden hair, the same glorious blue eyes! But what is she murmuring in her sleep. Ah! now I catch the words of a song from my own childhood days:

'Inconsolable and stricken
Is that throbbing heart of thine;
But a message that can quicken
Comes to it of love divine!

Heed it, for it brings thee weal, 'Tis a solemn, last appeal: Ope thy heart to God, nor fear Though eternity draws near.'"

"Yes, it can't be far away now! White is my hair, my limbs grow weak, and my strength is waning however much I try to hide the fact. But alas, how shall I open my heart? It died long ago—died with my sons and their father!"

Long she sat thus in deep reflection, her wrinkled old face hidden in her hands.

Suddenly she heard the flutelike voice of the child exclaim:

"Father, dear Father, please give me a drink! I am so thirsty, and my head is so hot! O, what a horrid dream I have had!"

But when Swerta leaned over the bed, the child started up and cried in terror:

"Where am I? What has happened? Where is my father?"

"Poor dear!" Swerta replied, "if your

father was with you on the ship, he is now at the bottom of the sea, for the vessel was lost in the storm."

Stricken to the heart, the child moaned: "Then it was not all a bad dream! O Father, my own dear Father—O, my head, how it aches! I can't understand it all!"

Moaning she wrung her little hands and sank back upon the bed where soon her surcharged heart found relief in a flood of tears.

Swerta gave the weeping girl a soothing potion, whereupon she soon sank into a deep sleep.

"She must have some milk when she wakes," murmured the old woman. "My coarse food is not fit for her to eat."

Taking a silver pitcher, Swerta hastily left her cave only to return presently, her pitcher filled with fresh foaming milk.

But down in the village the women stood about in groups eagerly discussing the miracle that Swerta had begged for milk and had expressed her gratitude for receiving it.

A long weary week passed while the child lay tossing about in a high fever. Tenderly Swerta cared for her, only leaving her side to fetch the things necessary for her comfort. The greater part of the time the child lay as in a trance, but when she occasionally regained consciousness, she would weep heart-breaking tears for her father, for the stately ship, and for the brave men who had gone down in it; and though Swerta's heart went out to her, she was yet to learn the secret of speaking words of comfort and cheer.

At last, one bright morning, the girl awoke free from fever and eagerly drank the mug of milk given her. As she handed back the mug, she threw her small white arms lovingly about the old woman's neck.

"Let me love you," she pleaded. "My father is gone, my brother Fergus is far away, and I must have someone to love or it will break my heart!"

Swerta made no reply, but pressed the child so closely to her bosom that she could feel the throbbing of her loving heart.

Long they sat thus holding each other in close embrace; then the old woman gently laid the girl upon the bed murmuring:

"You have found the key to my heart, little one—I do love you! God be praised that I am still capable of love!"

From that moment Brenda, for such was the child's name, grew rapidly better. She was soon able to leave her bed and put on some of her pretty clothes which Swerta had taken from her chest rescued from the sea.

My father was a merchant and made many journeys on his ship," Brenda informed her old friend and protectress. "Far away from here we lived in a fine home, not on an island but on the mainland. My own dear mother died long, long ago. My brother Fergus lives in a large city where he is attending college, but I was often permitted to accompany my dear father on his sea voyages, for he loved me dearly."

Sometimes the little girl forgot her sorrow, gazed curiously upon the strange fittings of the cliff dwelling, and amused herself with the many gay and strange trinkets to be found there. But she would soon grow serious again, and stand looking out over the sea through the window openings cut in the cliff, while tears dimmed her eyes or flowed unchecked down her wan cheeks.

"Tell me something about the beauties of heaven," she begged of her strange protectress. "My father is up there in heaven with God and the Saviour—of that I am very sure."

"You are fortunate to know that," Swerta sighed. "As for me, I have long ago forgotten all I ever knew about such things."

"Then you must read about them in my Bible which lies in the chest," Brenda urged.

"I am afraid I have forgotten how to read; in fact, I never could read very well," Swerta admitted.

"Let me read to you," Brenda begged.
"I am sure that it will drive away the sadness from your heart."

And so Brenda fetched a well bound copy of the New Testament, and there in the gloomy witch's cave she began to read the beautiful stories of Jesus the friend of sinners. Every day Brenda would read to her until Swerta began to feel that God had indeed sent the lovely child with the key to unlock her old hardened heart to the saving truths of time and eternity.

Meanwhile the short but beautiful summer had come to the island. The tranquil sea shimmered in the sun, green grass and meadow flowers sprang up as if by magic, and the barefooted children of the fisherfolk romped in merry sport about the island.

Then Swerta began to lead her little ward out of the gloomy cavern into the open in order that Brenda's pale cheeks might regain their rosy bloom and her young heart might become bright and gay again.

Timidly the half-wild children gazed upon the beautiful, strange girl; and they secretly wondered why Swerta no longer chased them away with angry looks and harsh words.

Before long a few of the bravest children ventured to approach the beautiful stranger, bringing gifts of flowers, shells, or colored stones. Then, one day, Brenda left the side of her protectress and began to mingle with the children in their sports, where she soon assumed the part of a little queen among them, but a queen full of love and kindness.

What splendid, merry games Brenda taught them! And how sweet her voice as she sang to them song upon song which she patiently taught them to sing also!

But Brenda was not always in a mood to join in their sports. Sometimes she appeared among her playmates with pale face and tear-dimmed eyes.

"To-day," she would say, "my heart is not on earth but in heaven with my father

and mother, and I would cry without ceasing if I could not find consolation in this book. Come, gather around me, if you wish to hear what God has to say to us."

The wild and thoughtless among the children would make their escape to clamber among the cliffs or wade in the shallows along the beach; but the more serious minded among them would form a circle around Brenda as she sat on a high moss covered rock reading from her Bible, and in her childish way telling them wonderful stories about the Saviour of all mankind.

It often happened that the elders also drew near to listen to Brenda who with eyes raised to heaven would speak to them as one divinely inspired. Her own deep grief and her daily communing with Swerta had put a stamp of thoughtful seriousness upon her youthful mind.

Swerta, too, was greatly changed. She had begun to practice reading, an art which she had but sparingly acquired in her girlhood from the old pastor, and in

which she now to her great joy grew daily more proficient.

Eagerly she read and pondered the inspired words, and she discovered much in them that the child was as yet not able to grasp.

But alas for her peace of mind! Swerta's soul was filled with deep remorse over the life she had led these many long years. Much, yes, almost all of what she had said and done appeared to her now in the light of this wonderful book as delusion and folly, nay, even as willful deceit on her part.

As time passed the fishermen began to complain that Swerta was becoming entirely useless to them. Only at rare intervals now did she make predictions as to wind and weather, and there was now none of her former boastful assurance, for she always ended her prognostications with the words, "if it be God's will."

This sorely displeased the rough fishermen, and they began to withhold from the

old woman her customary share of supplies, until she would have suffered actual want, had not the other women of the island for sweet Brenda's sake smuggled supplies of food and drink to them.

One day the report was spread among the villagers that Swerta would appear to them shortly before sunset and that she had important declarations to make. Old and young alike were on hand at the appointed time, curious to hear what she could have to tell them.

She appeared before them in her usual gorgeous dress, the star-dotted veil billowing about her form, and the wellknown staff in her hand. Close beside her stood Brenda clinging to her hand.

She began to speak with great solemnity:

"Once more I have summoned you to meet me that I may remove the veil from all my mysterious sayings and doings these many years, even as I now remove this veil from my head."

So saying she let fall the veil and stood uncovered before them, her thin white hair fluttering in the breeze.

"Behold my white hair," she continued. "See my shrunken cheeks and my trembling hands! My time on earth is short; eternity for me is near. And on Eternity's mighty throne sits One whose eyes are as flaming fire, before which there is no concealment, no deception. To His piercing eyes the secret thoughts and counsels of the heart are manifest. Before I leave you forever it is therefore my desire to unburden my soul of all those things which cannot endure in the presence of the Almighty. Listen, my friends! For years I have deceived you and myself. And this I have done, not to do you harm, but because of my proud, unbending spirit, and because of the power and influence I thus gained over you. All that I have told you of storms and sunshine, of raging billows, of heat and cold, you might have learned for yourselves by heeding and studying the

numerous signs that God has given for our guidance in the sky and on land and sea. In the days of the old sea kings my cliff dwelling was, no doubt, a lookout point from which such observations were made. for there is no better place to view the sky and the mighty sea that surrounds us on all sides. But this I will say, that no man can with absolute certainty predict the changes in wind and weather except the Blessed One of whom men exclaimed, 'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him.' — As for the voices I have heard and the visions I have seen, these have all been products of my own disordered fancy. It is true that I believed in these things myself, but my conscience often told me that by these means I was abusing my power over you. And I will now confess to you that all these years my heart has been cold and void of love, that I have been unhappy and discontented despite my position of influence among you. All last winter my

anguish of soul increased, for I felt eternity drawing near, and many of the things I had heard in my girlhood in the church yonder kept recurring to me and filled me with a spirit of unrest. Then God took pity on me and sent Brenda to our shores. The night before her coming I had seen and heard her in my dreams as an angel of light speaking words of solemn warning. You know what this child has meant to us all and what a change she has wrought in my life in unlocking my stubborn heart to divine truth. And now I lay aside all the power I have won over you even as I lay aside this gorgeous dress which has been a symbol of that power."

A few swift motions and the costly dress fell to Swerta's feet, who now stood before them in the simple coarse dress of a fisherwoman.

"See," she continued, "I am now but a poor, helpless old woman. If you will come to my cave, I will gladly teach you all that long observation and study has

taught me about the starry sky and its influence on wind and weather. I will also instruct you in the healing properties of various herbs, and as reward only ask of you sufficient food for myself and Brenda. And now give heed to this my last advice to you! Send your strongest boat to the larger islands, or better still, to the mainland and tell there the story of the shipwreck and the rescued child, in order that this information may be spread far and wide. Request also that a pious pastor may be sent to us to prepare our souls for the life to come. I pray God that I may live to see the day when this dear little girl may leave our barren shores and be restored to a brother's arms and when the little bell in the ruined church tower shall call you together to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Thus spoke Swerta, and waving farewell to the assembly, she directed her feeble steps, supported by Brenda, to her cavern home.

Deeply moved, the majority of those present departed for their homes. A few of the rougher element remained, and after consulting together they decided to leave the island as soon as possible and seek a wilder and more secluded island where they, undisturbed by pastor or foolish women, might gather in their harvests from the deep.

The very next day the men began to repair the large boat which of late years had been seldom used. But it was late in the fall before the old boat was made seaworthy and the fishermen could start upon their perilous journey to the mainland.

Anxiously their home-coming was awaited, and it was a day of great rejoicing when the boat was sighted and finally beached, laden with a variety of supplies for the winter, for the purchase of which Swerta had sacrificed a part of her treasures.

The brave sailors related how kindly they had been received on the mainland

and how every effort had been made there to spread the report of the shipwreck and the rescued child. They also brought home the good news that a God-fearing pastor would be sent them as soon as possible.

The long winter that followed passed uneventfully. There was little of wreckage cast up by the sea, but what little was secured was fairly divided, for the rougher element had ere this vanished to parts unknown. To these the advent of Brenda had indeed been a curse, for they had hardened and closed their hearts to the voice of God.

During the long winter evenings Swerta had many visitors whom she, according to promise, instructed in all her lore. The women and children gathered about Brenda to hear her read from the Good Book to . them.

As the days began to lengthen, Swerta's strength gradually decreased until she had to spend most of her time in bed. Brenda never left her side except to perform the

necessary duties of their simple household. But when the weary old woman closed her eyes in sleep, Brenda would take her stand by one of the windows and gaze yearningly out over the sea whence she longed for a message from her far-away home.

The fisherfolk, too, were longing for their new pastor. They repaired the dilapidated church and scoured the rusty old bell until it sent its joyous peal over sea and cliff, strong and clear as of old. Hard by the church they erected a new cottage, neater and roomier than the others, for the coming pastor. For this new cottage it was Swerta's delight to supply most of the necessary furnishings.

Summer came at last, and with it warmth and sunshine. The deep blue sky smiled down upon the island filling all hearts with gladness.

"Brenda dear," begged Swerta, "lead me once more out under the open sky. Not many times more shall I behold the beauties of this life."

Supported by Brenda, she tottered feebly down the cliff path to gaze once more out over the wide sea. To-day her eyes were bright and sparkling as of old.

"Don't you see something out there?" she suddenly asked, pointing with her staff toward the sea. "There, where the blue sky seems to touch the silvery surface of the sea!"

"No, I see nothing," Brenda replied gently.

"But now, now!" Swerta cried. "You must see it now! It's the mast of a large vessel!"

Brenda gazed intently over the gleaming waters.

"Now I see it!" she cried at last as she grasped Swerta's hand. "It grows clearer and larger every moment, and I do believe that it is coming to our island!"

"Run and ring the bell," she cried, "so that all the villagers may gather at this place. But first lead me to yonder rock where I may sit and view their coming."

Quickly Brenda executed her orders, and soon men, women, and children could be seen joyously gathering upon the beach.

Nearer and nearer came the large stately vessel. As a giant swan the ship skimmed over the glassy sea, a light breeze filling its snow-white sails.

But the small harbor with its submerged reefs was fit for fishing boats only; therefore the stately ship had to cast anchor far from shore and lie there gently rocking on the waves.

A large boat was lowered from the ship. Several men clambered down the rope ladder and various boxes and bales were also lowered, after which the boat set out for the shore. Brenda's heart throbbed loudly. Would she receive a message from her brother?

As the boat approached the island, one of its occupants arose in the prow and looked eagerly toward the shore. He was a youth scarcely emerged from boyhood, his abundant light hair fluttering in the wind.

A minute or two more of heart-breaking suspense—then Brenda darted down the beach crying: "Fergus, my brother! My darling brother!"

Soon brother and sister were clasped in close embrace, while tears of joy and sorrow coursed down their cheeks.

Swerta's feelings, too, were overpowered at this meeting. She swayed and would have fallen from the rock, had not some women supported her. Tenderly Swerta was carried to the cavern, and soon Fergus and Brenda were sitting at her bedside.

Fergus related how he had mourned both father and sister as dead until the news of the castaway on the northern island had reached him, when he made immediate preparations to bring his sister back home.

"I have left college now," he continued, "and returned to our home. It has seemed empty and desolate since the great misfortune, but now, dear Brenda, you will

again bring sunshine into the dear old home. Our good Aunt Ursulla, who has been a mother to us for years, is eagerly longing to take you to her heart again. As for me, I am learning to become an experienced merchant under the guidance of Duncan who, as you know, was father's right hand man. I will soon be of age and ready to take over our large business interests. May God help me to carry them forward to the honor and glory of His name! And you, my sweet sister, I will keep and guard as the apple of my eye."

While Brenda was preparing a simple meal for her brother, and Swerta's feeble eyes were shifting from sister to brother with loving interest, the fisherfolk were greeting and welcoming their new pastor, a young sturdy man, whose lovely wife had accompanied him to this far-away charge. Both were willing to share weal and woe with the islanders and to devote all their strength and talents for their temporal and spiritual welfare.

The ship remained at anchor for three days. Then at the moment of parting Fergus and Brenda kneeled at Swerta's side to receive her final blessing.

Warmly and with swimming eyes Brenda kissed the shrunken cheeks of her kind old friend and protectress.

"Who will care for you now when I depart?" Brenda sobbed.

"I will need no one's care," Swerta whispered. "Eternity is very near to me."

Meanwhile the pastor's wife had entered the cavern unnoticed, and as brother and sister departed hand in hand, she seated herself by the dying old woman's side.

Brenda's parting with the islanders consumed a great deal of time—at least so thought the captain of the ship. Another kiss, another hand clasp—such were the eager demands of one and all. Then there were little remembrances pressed upon Brenda from all sides, and innumerable requests for one more verse from the pre-

CAST UP FROM THE SEA

cious Book as a word of farewell. But at last the boat was shoved from the sands, and presently it reached the ship. As the anchor was raised and the sails hoisted, farewell hails were heard from the island, while from the ship fluttering handker-chiefs sent a parting greeting. But suddenly all was still. The measured, solemn tolling of the church bell was borne across the waves. The young pastor was ringing the requiem for the departed soul of Swerta. She had entered into eternity.





Christmas Eve

The first snow had fallen and had decked the pines and firs of the extensive forest in their glistening Christmas finery. Even the forester's cottage in the great clearing had put on a picturesque appearance. Six rosy-cheeked children stood before the cottage door expectantly looking down the road, where a sleigh had made its way through the deep snow. For the father had departed for the railway station to bring home their oldest brother who had been away to school in a distant city.

"It takes so long, and I am so cold!" wailed Otto, the youngest, rubbing his numb little hands briskly.

"Go in then, and look out through the window with mother," advised Marie, his gentle sister, a girl of fourteen.

"No, no!" protested Otto. "Walter must see at once that I am big now and wear pants. When he was home last year, I still wore a girl's dress. But O, my hands are frozen stiff!"

"Come, stick them under my apron, and let me blow on them," urged Marie drawing the little one to her side.

"Listen, listen!" cried the boisterous Fritz. "I hear the sleigh bells. They come, they come! Back, Fido! Down, Sultan!"

But the two splendid hunting dogs this time failed to obey their young master, but raced away down the road, barking joyously.

Now the mother also stepped out through the door, followed by the faithful old maid servant, who eagerly awaited her darling boy and now stood there with folded hands as if in prayer. Of course all the children

had a warm place in her heart, but Walter, so manly and kind, whom she had rocked in his cradle and carried in her arms sixteen years ago, surely he was the best of them all—yes, the best lad in all the world! He had always been a fine boy, and the only black-haired one among a troop of red-cheeked, yellow-haired children. But now, alas, he was ailing and had been sent home to rest up for a time. Constant study was not good for anyone—so Lottie, the faithful maid, had always declared, though no one would ever listen to her. Now she was secretly determined to carry him into the house if he was too weak to walk. She was strong enough to do it, she felt sure! But see! He leaps nimbly from the sleigh and is soon in his mother's close embrace, while the other children are jumping merrily about him. When each of them had received a kiss, Lottie, too, received a hearty hug from the lad, whose cheeks, she sorrowfully observed, were pale in spite of the bracing winter air, and

whose hands were thin and bony. Her mistress had told Lottie that Walter was suffering from a nervous breakdown, whatever that might be. They did have such queer ailments in the city—ailments unheard of in the fresh open air of the country!

But now for warm soup and the two chickens that had sacrificed their lives in honor of Walter's home-coming! At Walter's request even Lottie had to take her place at table, that she too might listen to his account of school life experiences. But the father soon cut short the lively narrative when he noticed that his son's cheeks began to glow and his eyes to burn feverishly. Both parents conducted him up to the pleasant chamber which had been prepared for him. With deep feeling Walter observed that it had been furnished with the best that the house afforded. There near the window stood his mother's own writing desk. In a cozy corner he observed his sainted grandfather's comfort-

able armchair. And on the wall hung his favorite picture to which he had stretched out his arms even as a little child. It had then been the chief ornament of the nursery. The picture represented the Christchild in the manger upon which two bright angels were looking through an open window. Gratefully Walter pressed the hands of his parents, and then after a moment's hesitation he asked:

"Where are all the old books that used to stand on the shelves in the cupboard? I had rather counted on them to pass away the time with."

"Locked away, my boy," replied the father. "You are not to read a single word! When the weather is fine, you are to roam about in the woods. In bad weather you will, no doubt, find something in the drawer of the writing desk to occupy your time."

Walter opened the desk and his eyes sparkled with pleasure, for the drawer

contained all the needful articles for drawing and painting.

"I knew that it would please you," the father remarked; "and were you not a little artist long before you had any intentions of becoming a scholar?"

"A little, a very little of both, I'm a-fraid," answered Walter blushing.

Winter days soon came when even the robust brothers found difficulty in making their way to school through storm and snow, and Walter could leave the house only on rare occasions. But time did not hang heavy on his hands, for a great plan was shaping itself in his active mind. His plan was nothing less than to celebrate Christmas in a more splendid manner than they had ever celebrated it before.

With trembling hands he began to paint enlarged copies of the figures in his favorite picture. The angels, he planned, should hover over the manger, supported by fine invisible wires. Of course Joseph and Mary must also be present, and these

he succeeded to paint after many discouraging failures. When all was ready, Walter permitted the other children to come up into his chamber to view the results of his labors. How amazed they were at the artistic skill of their brother! Never before had anything so beautiful and grand been seen in their forest home!

"Now listen to me," commanded Walter; "and whatever you do, don't utter a word of this to our parents! We are going to prepare a beautiful Christmas celebration. I am going to build a small stable and deck it with fir branches. Through the window of the stable will be seen sparkling stars shining in a sky made of blue oilpaper, just as in the picture. The angels will gaze through the window, and Joseph and Mary will stand reverently by the manger. Your part will be to learn to recite and sing a number of beautiful Christmas songs. On Christmas Eve one of us, arrayed as an angel, must invite our parents to our Christmas celebration and escort them up to this room."

"I'll be the angel!" cried Fritz excitedly.
"You'll be the clown, now as always!"
retorted Otto quickly, hiding himself behind his sister in order to escape the anger of his madcap brother, who threatened him with his fists.

"Stop that!" cried Walter sternly. "There'll be no fighting here! Don't you remember the angel's song: 'Peace on earth?' Marie is best fitted to prepare the white robes of an angel, and I will make a pair of beautiful golden wings. You others will represent the shepherd and the three wise men and recite verses appropriate to the parts you play. Every afternoon after school you will gather here to practice your pieces and songs. At that hour father is never home, as you know he makes his daily round through the deer park at that time.

"But mother will hear us sing," Otto objected.

"That makes no difference. She will enjoy our celebration anyway," Walter declared.

"Our Walter must surely be a magician!" the mother declared to her husband a few days later. "You know how the children always lag and banter over their studies. But now the entire flock scarcely give themselves time to eat their supper before they sit down quiet as mice to their books and slates in order to get up to Walter's chamber as soon as possible."

"What business have they up there?" the father inquired. "They should leave him in peace!"

"O, I suppose it's some secret, and I'm sure they will do Walter no harm!" the mother declared. "You see yourself how strong and active he's growing, and how he roams about outdoors whenever the weather permits."

Yes, all were very busy indeed—that is, all but Lottie, who seemed to have a sudden desire to escape from her work, as she made frequent requests for permission to visit her relatives in the village, in whom she ordinarily showed very little in-

terest. She would take the heavy sledge used to transport wood and Christmas trees to town and when she returned, she had with her a number of mysterious packages which immediately vanished into Walter's chamber.

At last all the preparations were made. and Christmas Eve, a day of universal rejoicing and gladness, arrived. In former years the children's joy had found expression in boisterous and noisy demonstrations so that the mother had to take them to task and remind them of the solemnity and sanctity of the Christmas miracle. But now there was no need of this. All the children seemed to have caught the spirit of the day. Happiness of a subdued and quiet nature reigned supreme, and all were actuated by a desire to help in the Christmas preparations. They were determined that the little mother should have all her work done in good time, so that she might share in the joyful surprise prepared by them. All day a light snow

had fallen, but when the forester returned from his inspection of the deer park, the sky had cleared and an evening star gleamed brightly over his home. The words of holy writ occurred to him: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother—." Thereupon he folded his weatherbeaten hands and prayed softly: "Come also into my house, thou Saviour of the world! Enter into our hearts, that we may all at last enter into thy mansions in heaven above!"

How quiet all things were! In former years the merry troop of children had run to meet him, crying: "Father, how soon will it begin? Will you light the Christmas tree now?" But to-day the mother sat alone beside the lamp in the large, neatly tidied living room. A gaily decked Christmas tree stood ready to be lighted, and about its base lay a heap of Christmas presents for the children.

"Where are the little folks?" asked the forester wonderingly.

"They are all up in Walter's chamber. Let them be; they are so happy and have been so good and helpful all day. Come, put on your jacket and slippers, and eat your supper."

While the father was partaking of hot coffee and a large piece of Christmas cake, his eyes rested upon the modest little heap of presents.

"A rather scanty pile this year," he remarked sadly. "Gladly would I have given you more money for presents, but it was impossible!"

"Don't worry about that," said his wife soothingly. "The sooner the children learn to find in the Christ-child their greatest happiness, the better it will be for them. Listen, someone is knocking at the door! Visitors on Christmas Eve in this retired nook—that has never happened to us before."

The door flew open, and a very lively,

unexpected visitor stepped into the room: an angel with a happy, smiling face; golden hair, a long white robe and shining wings. The angel held aloft a fir branch with a sparkling candle burning at its lip. Although the parents in the heavenly messenger recognized their nine year old Helen, yet the lovely sight brought tears of happiness to their eyes. In silvery accents the angel spoke the following lines:

"Ring out, sweet song, triumphant, clear Your melody for all to hear; As sings the sweet-toned nightingale, The lark, the rising sun to hail.

Resound, O song, in accents sweet The coming of God's Son to greet! He comes, the Christ Child, full of love To save us to His home above.

Let all the world rejoice and sing In honor of our Lord and King! The Babe born unto us this day Once in a lowly manger lay.

And would you see Him, follow me; He dwells e'en under your rooftree; And in your hearts He'd dwell with you And be your Friend and Saviour true."

With an inviting motion of the hand, the heavenly messenger conducted the parents up the stairs; Lottie following with folded hands and beating heart. The door to Walter's chamber flew open, and a flood of light greeted their coming. The three were assigned seats in front of a curtain that concealed a part of the room. Behind this curtain the angel disappeared, and Walter's clear voice was heard reciting:

"And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife."

As the last words were being read the

seven year old twins, Theo and Anna, stepped from behind the curtain, clad in simple frocks, and carrying bundles on their shoulders, and supporting their steps with a staff, clearly representing Joseph and Mary arrived at their journey's end. Facing each other they recited:

MARY

"Dear Joseph, tell me where we may Find rest and shelter for this day."

JOSEPH

"Dear Virgin, I have heard men say There's a stable where we may Find rest and shelter for this day."

MARY

"Dear Joseph, tell me where I may Find a place my Child to lay."

JOSEPH

"Dear Virgin, lowly manger may Be the cradle where to lay The blessed Child to rest this day."

MARY

"Dear Joseph, O, where shall I find Swaddling clothes my Child to wind?"

JOSEPH

"Blessed Virgin, thou wilt find Linens, old and coarse, to wind Snug the Saviour of mankind."

MARY

"On the morrow where shall we Find shelter and security?"

JOSEPH

"In the heav'ns above, my dear, Where God's angels hover near."

Thereupon the two disappeared behind the curtain, which parted wide in the middle, revealing a stable decked with evergreen. O how beautiful the Christ Child appeared as he lay in the manger watched over by Joseph and Mary and a host of angels suspended from fine wires or peeping forth from among the evergreen branches! Cattle and donkeys also could be seen.

Again a voice was heard reciting:

"While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born son,

and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

While these words were being read the three youngest children approached the manger and sang:

"We pray Thee now, O grant that we, Sweet Christ Child dear, May hear Thy voice, may speak with Thee!"

From behind the curtain the answer came:

"Sing, little children, sing!"

"Pray tell us why upon this earth, Sweet Christ Child dear, We find Thee here of human birth?"

"Because of love divine!"

"Art Thou not God Almighty, why, Sweet Christ Child dear, As babe in arms dost Thou then lie?"

"Because of love divine!"

"Why must Thou in a stable dwell, Sweet Christ Child dear, When all the world is Thine; pray tell?"

"Because of love divine!"

"Why do men scorn and hate Thee so, Sweet Christ Child dear, And why so humble, we would know?"

"Because of love divine!"

"And for such love divine can we, Sweet Christ Child dear, Give aught in recompense to Thee?"

"Your hearts' true love alone!"

"Our hearts' true love is Thine."

"Then are ye truly mine!"

For a moment all the little ones vanished behind the curtain only to reappear as Walter's voice was heard again reciting:

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came up on them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid."

Upon these words the angel that had

summoned the parents stepped forth and spoke:

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Then all the children, with the parents joining in, sang:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

Grouping themselves about the manger, the children then sang softly:

"Silent night, Holy night,
All is calm, all is bright.
Round you Virgin Mother and Child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night, Shepherds quake at the sight, Glories stream from heaven afar,

Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia; Christ, the Savior is born! Christ, the Savior is born!

Silent night, Holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

When the little shepherds had withdrawn behind the curtain, there was a brief delay while swift changes of costume were taking place; but before long a girlish voice was raised in song:

"A gleaming star three wise men,
Who mighty kings were styled,
Led from the land of sunrise
Unto a newborn Child.
They brought Him gifts untold,
And tendered Him with homage
Their incense, myrrh, and gold."

During the singing a large golden star could be seen slowly rising amidst the evergreen branches overshadowing the

stable, until it came to rest "over where the young child was." From behind the curtain then appeared a splendid company: Fritz, Rudolph, and Theo with golden crowns on their heads, and clad in purple robes, which the mother recognized as the old draperies of her guest chamber. Theo's blond head had been entirely concealed by an old black veil in which holes had been cut for the eyes. As little Otto had stoutly insisted upon taking part in the royal procession, he had been dressed in the white robe of a page, and appeared holding up the trailing mantle of King Theo. Before the manger the kings made reverent obeisance, and kneeling they presented on golden platters their precious gifts to the Christ Child. The platters were made of cardboard and covered with gold paper and were the product of the joint labors of Walter and Marie. Behind the curtain a voice now recited:

"Three mighty kings God's loving hand Led with a star from Orient land

Through kingly, great Jerusalem
To lowly Child in Bethlehem.—
Lord, lead us to this Child, that we
May be Thine own, and serve but Thee!

On bended knee they homage paid
Unto the Child in manger laid.
With precious gifts they Him adore:
Gold, incense, myrrh, a plenteous store!—
O God, accept from us our all:
Heart, life, soul, goods—the gift is small!

And Mary, ere the kings did part,
Gave her sweet Child unto each heart
To be a manna on their way,
A guide to lead them night and day.—
God, give to us this bread, this guide!
In life, in death with us abide."

Then the kings rose to their feet, and joined by the other children, struck up in full chorus their mother's favorite song:

"Morning Star, from out the night, Thou dost make the world all bright! Christ Child dear, be Thou near, Light me on life's journey here!

O, the glory of Thy light Far transcends the sun so bright!

Child divine, splendors Thine More than thousand suns outshine.

And Thy cheering beacon light Will we follow through the night. Beaming Star, near and far Thine all praise and honor are!

O my soul's bright Beacon, glow In my heart, nor dimmer grow! Christ Child dear, be Thou near, Light me on life's journey here!"

At the last words of the song the curtain closed, and the children thronged about their parents with loving manifestations of joy and gladness.

"Wasn't it all grand!" cried little Theo.

I am a real black Moor, let me tell you, and I intend to remain so all evening.

Look out, Lottie, or I'll scare you to death!"

"No, no, my child!" spoke the father soberly. "I know that it was all a play, but a play of solemn, sacred import, which must not be permitted to end in jest and frolic. The Moorish king did not think

about that he was black. His whole heart and soul were directed to the Christ Child. Do you follow his example, my Theo. My dear children, you have given us great pleasure. Come downstairs now and rejoice in the gifts of the Christ Child to you."

Merrily they laid aside their disguises and were soon assembled about the shining Christmas tree. With loving forethought the parents had anticipated the dearest wish of each of their children.

"Look!" cried Fritz. "Rudolph and I have each a company of soldiers. Mine have red uniforms and his blue. What battles we will wage these long winter evenings! I'd a thousand times rather have these than a chessboard!"

"And I have the skates I've been longing for!" cried Theo. "Just you wait, Fritz, I'll soon outstrip you on the ice."

Otto galloped bravely on his "brandnew" rocking-horse, the very same which years ago had been the delight of Walter,

but which now appeared in a new coat of paint, and was equipped with a new bit and bridle. So each thought his gift the best, and all pressed about their parents with hugs and kisses. The gentle little Helen manifested her joy less stormily; but she was, perhaps, the happiest of them all, as her little heart was thrilled with mother joy. The Christ Child had brought her a porcelain doll that could actually be bathed! Helen had seen but one such doll before, but she had never even hoped to become the proud owner of one. And now it lay there in its dainty white folding-bed, and near by stood a little basket full of remnants of white cloth together with needles and thread! With dreaming eyes the motherly little Helen sat planning beautiful dresses of all kinds which her busy fingers would sew. O the happy times she would have with her baby doll when storm and snow kept them all indoors!

When all the presents had been suffi-

ciently examined and admired and the lights in the Christmas tree began to go out, the mother declared:

"Now I will go and prepare our Christmas supper. Meanwhile two of you can take the small Christmas tree and a basket of provisions to the woodward's wife in the forest. Her husband lies sick at the hospital and her little girl is far from well. It won't take you long to get there and back. The moon is shining and the frozen snow makes easy going."

"I'll go, I'll go!" cried all the children eagerly.

"Fritz and Rudolph will go," the father decided.

"O mother," said Helen timidly, "may not I send Lizzy my old doll Clara? I have lately made her a fine dress."

The permission was freely given, and the two lads hurried off with Christmas tree, doll, and basket in tow. It must have sorely displeased poor old Clara to be thrust under Rudolph's arm as a bundle

of rags; but then, to carry a doll was almost beneath the dignity of sturdy Rudolph. But what will one not do on Christmas Eve! At first they proceeded on their way in silence, for the beautiful night with its beaming moon and glittering stars, and the sacred Christmas songs they had sung, all had put the ordinarily boisterous lads in a serious mood. But at last Fritz broke the silence:

"Do you know what we will do? We won't go in at all. We'll just place all this stuff by the door, light the candles in the tree, and run away. When we're a little ways from the house, I'll ring mother's dinner bell which I picked up from the cupboard as we came away."

"But why don't you want to go in?" asked Rudolph.

"Bah, can't you imagine how sad it will be? I think a good deal of the poor sick woodward, and I'm sure I will cry when I see the two lonesome creatures within. And it's a shame to cry on Christmas Eve.

"That's true enough," Rudolph agreed. "And besides, perhaps Lizzy will think that the angels brought the things. That would be great fun."

"Listen!" said Fritz. "Do you hear that sound from the village? They are singing Christmas carols from the church tower, and the sound is carried to us through the still air. Isn't it solemn and grand!"

A while they stood listening to the distant music, then Rudolph whispered: "We'll try to be good and kind for the Christ Child's sake, won't we?"

Fritz nodded in silence and soon the boys were standing before the woodward's cottage.

"There must be at least one song," whispered Rudolph. "We'll sing it softly."

While the lads quietly made their preparations, the woodward's wife was sitting before the fireplace with pale little Lizzy looking quite sad and woebegone.

"Mother," sobbed the child, "won't the Christ Child bring us anything this year?"

"Nothing this year, I'm afraid," replied the mother sadly. "But pray to the Christ that He may make father well and strong again. That would be the best gift for us."

"But mother," insisted the little girl tearfully, "some little thing He might send us. I have prayed and prayed for a Christmas tree and a little doll. Since my Margaret fell all to pieces I have had no doll to play with. Why don't He send us a single thing? He's so great and rich!"

"I can't tell you, my child," replied the mother with tear-dimmed eyes. "But He comes to our hearts with comfort and peace. That is the best of all! Wait a few minutes, I will bake you a doll cooky, and then I will tell you the Christmas story."

Tears rolled down the mother's cheeks, as she set the pot of soup to heat upon the fire. Perhaps she ought to have asked her better lotted neighbors for some little Christmas joy for her child. But this she

felt it so hard to do! And up to this time by faithful work they had never lacked the necessaries of life.

Listen! Was not that the silvery tones of a bell? Lizzy sat spellbound.

"O, he's coming, after all!" she whispered, folding her hands in ecstasy.

Suddenly from beyond the closed door they heard the words of a beautiful song wafted to them through the evening stillness:

"O wondrous night, so full of grace! How brightly beamed the moon's fair face, How sparkled every star on high When Christ was born! May you and I Adore His holy name!

The angel hosts rejoicing sing:
'Praise be to God, our gracious King,
And peace on earth, good will to men!'
O, let the song resound again
In praise of Christ our Lord!

Midst fleecy clouds the angels so Adore their God, and homage show. With adoration and amaze The shepherds on the angels gaze, And worship God on high."

With folded hands mother and child had listened, and stood a while with bated breath after the song was ended.

"O mother," whispered Lizzy, "take a peek through the door — perhaps the angels have brought us something!"

Softly the mother opened the door and looked out. Wonder of wonders! Before the door stood a small Christmas tree with many burning candles, and leaning against a well filled basket stood the doll Clara in a bright red dress.

"The good angels have brought them!" exulted Lizzy. "I'm sure I heard them fly away through the tree tops!"

Now all the gifts were taken into the house, and Clara the doll was hugged and kissed as she had never dreamed of in her old days. Lizzy's thin pale cheeks grew rosy with happiness; the mother gratefully unpacked the basket containing all manner of Christmas dainties and thereto a large sack of coffee, a luxury that had not been found in the cottage for many a long

day. But best of all was a letter from the forester, not only because it contained a silver dollar, but chiefly because it contained a promise to take mother and child on the day after Christmas in the forester's sleigh on a visit to the father at the hospital.

"He will surely grow well and strong from joy when he sees us!" Lizzy declared.

"That I hardly dare hope," the mother replied. "But the Christ Child, who has given us so much good, will, I trust, hear our prayers and restore to us our dear father. You must remember to recite to him the beautiful verses I taught you. You haven't forgotten them, have you?"

"Indeed I haven't!" Lizzy declared. "I'll say them to you right now:"

"Sing Hosanna! David's Son
To His Zion comes in splendor.
Up! Prepare for Him a throne;
Worthy honors to Him render.
Strew with palms His path, that He
As Thy King may come to thee.

Sing Hosanna! Side by side
We will make all haste to meet Thee;
For our hearts are open wide
To receive, to hold, to greet Thee.
Dwell with us forevermore,
Gracious King, whom we adore!

Sing Hosanna! Through Thy Word
Hasten Thou our hearts to enter.
O, Thou Blest One of the Lord,
Let Thy mercy on us center!
Tarry not, O Saviour dear!
Hallelujah! Thou art near!"



